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ABSTRACT

The Florida Association of Professional Health Educators (FAPHE) has been instrumental in developing a voluntary registration/certification process to upgrade professional standards, identify health educators, and establish a network for the purpose of continuing education. Eight basic steps have been identified as necessary for the development of the plan: (1) establish a registration/certification committee within FAPHE; (2) determine the levels of certification needed; (3) determine the initial registration/certification requirements, including determination of criteria and time frame for "grandfathering in"; (4) determine the immediate and long-term goals for the plan; (5) develop a series of steps related to increasing requirements for registration/certification to be implemented over a period of years; (6) develop an examination procedure necessary for the plan; (7) develop the record keeping procedure and fee structure which will keep the plan financially self-supporting; and (8) implement the plan. A description is given of how each of these steps has been addressed, and the impact the project has had upon the FAPHE since its inception. (JD)

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SP 028 164

A Registration/Certification Process For Health Educators In The State of Florida

Jill W. Varnes and W. William Chen

As a result of the Role Deliniation Project and subsequent interest in professional competence, the Florida Association of Professional Health Educators (FAPHE) began investigating a voluntary registration/certification process in early 1983. FAPHE's intent is to provide a vehicle to upgrade professional standards, identify health educators, provide for voluntary registration/certification and establish a network for the purpose of continuing education. It was felt that FAPHE represented the most logical professional organization to accomplish these goals because it is the only state level organization which represents health educators regardless of their practice settings, i.e. schools, medical care facilities, community agencies, and worksites. Initially, an ad hoc committee was established to review and determine the feasibility of such a project. From the results of formal and informal surveys it was concluded that registration/certification would be supported and desired by practicing health educators in the state.

A preliminary plan was prepared and presented to representatives from the Florida Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, Florida Public Health Association's health education section, and Florida School Health Association, as well as the members of FAPHE. All approved the concept and agreed to assist in whatever way possible.

The ad hoc committee identified eight basic steps necessary for the development of a registration/certification plan:

1. Establish a registration/certification committee within FAPHE.
2. Determine the levels of certification needed.
3. Determine the initial registration/certification requirements, including determination of criteria and time frame for "grandfathering in".
4. Determine the immediate and long-term goals for the plan.
5. Develop a series of steps related to increasing requirements for registration/certification to be implemented over a period of years.
6. Develop an examination procedure necessary for the plan.
7. Develop the record keeping procedure and fee structure which will keep the plan financially self supporting.
8. Implement the plan.

This presentation will describe how FAPHE addressed each of the eight developmental steps as well as discuss the impact this project has had upon the organization in the short time since its inception.

Step One- Establish a registration/certification committee. In the process this actually resulted in two committees. A developmental committee was followed by a standing committee to oversee the process. The committee was appointed by FAPHE's president with representatives from other health education related organizations. The committee was charged with the final development of the plan and asked to specifically consider the following: 1) the need for a "grandfathering in" period, 2) the need for an examination, 3) a continuing education requirement, and 4) a mechanism to insure operational autonomy for the registration/certification committee.

Step Two- Determine the levels of certification needed. The committee members were in agreement that only one level of registration/certification was needed and that level would be based on entry level skills necessary for the health educator.

Step Three- Determine the initial registration/certification requirements, including determination of criteria and time frame for "grandfathering in". In order to be eligible to apply for registration/certification the individual must meet one of the following criteria:

1) Bachelor's or higher degree from an educational institution accredited by an established accrediting agency with a major in health science, health education or health promotion.
2) Current employment and not less than five years full time experience in a health education specialty and a Bachelor's degree from an accredited institution.
3) Current employment and not less than three years full time experience in a health education specialty and a Master's degree or higher from an accredited institution.

Individuals wishing to be "grandfathered in" have to meet one of the following criteria:

1) Be currently classified as an Active Professional member of FAPHE; or
2) individuals who have a Bachelor's degree and have been practicing in the field of health education in the state of Florida for five years; or
3) individuals who have a Master's degree or higher and have functioned in the role of health educator for three years.

The "grandfathering in" period began in January, 1986 and would remain in effect for one calendar year.

Step Four- Determine the immediate and long-term goals for the procedure. FAPHE established its plan of registration/certification for the following purposes:

1) Identification of individuals who practice health education in the state of Florida.

2) Certification that those persons who fulfilled the prescribed standards are professionally qualified to conduct and/or administer health education activities.
3) Establishment and improvment of standards for professional leadership in the field of health education.
4) Provision of a means for professional designation--Certified Health Educator (C.H.E.).
5) Provision of a mechanism for networking for the purpose of continuing education.

It is sincerely believed that this process will increase the recognition and credibility of the professional health educator in the state. The long-term goals established by the committee include an affiliation with a national level of registration/certification and/or a state licensure process beyond that utilized for teachers.

Step Five- Develop a series of steps related to increasing requirements for registration/certification to be implemented over a period of years. Several steps were established for the purpose of increasing standards and requirements in the state of Florida. One is the development of an examination which everyone who applies after the "grandfathering in" period must take. Another deals with the eligibility to apply: Three years after implementation of the process (1990) no one may apply who does not have a degree in health science/education/promotion. Renewal can be made every two years, but includes a continuing education requirement. The Registration/Certification Committee may determine additional ways to meet the goals established for the plan as well as identify new goals.

Step Six- Develop an examination procedure necessary for the plan. The first task was to develop the test itself, then to develop a method of administration. The committee developed the initial test items using the knowledge and skills identified in the Refined and Verified Role of the Entry Level Health Educator as described by the National Task Force on te Preparation and Practice of Health Educators. Each committee member was assigned to develop items from a specified section, and the entire committee worked together to refine and edit the initial test items. The committee determined that there was a need for both a written and an oral examination format, therefore items were developed for both types of administration. After much consideration and discussion, it was determined that test items based on health content would also be included. This determination was made based upon committee contention that every entry level health educator should have a foundation of basic content information. FAPHE's membership was surveyed to determine what health content areas are needed by the entry level health educator regardless of practice setting.

An expert jury was identified to review and further refine the test items. The expert jury consisted of four

highly regarded health education professionals in the state of Florida. Based upon this review, the test items were further refined and changed to reflect the jury's suggestions. The next step was a technical review by an expert in educational testing development. Two test instruments were developed using the test items developed. These instruments are currently being field tested. The first administration of the exam for registration/certification purposes will be in April, 1987. The exam will be administered at regular intervals thereafter.

STEP SEVEN - Develop your record keeping system and fee structure which will keep the procedure financially self supporting. FAPHE agreed to take on the cost of developing the process and any possible expences related to the test construction, these monies to be paid back once the process was implimented. Non - FAPHE members would be assessed $50.00 for registration which included the examination fee; FAPHE members would be assessed $25.00.
Registration/Certification must be renewed every two years and proof of continuing education must be provided. The renewal fee would be determined by the committee, but the guidelines state a reasonable fee shall be assessed. The renewal fee should be sufficient to cover the administrative cost such as stationery, envelopes, postage, renewal stickers, etc.

STEP EIGHT - Implement the plan. FAPHE's grandfathering in period officially began in January 1986. Prior to that time we made extensive efforts to "get the word out" to Florida professionals. We published a statement in each state level newsletter and journal, and provided information at state level meetings. Health educators in other professional organizations were encouraged to share their infomation with collegues. Our goal was to reach practicing or degreed health educators, but in reality we attracted the attention of a variety of health care professionals interested in our registration process. We depended upon FAPHE's membership screening criteria to determine if the applicant was eligible for registration/certification with FAPHE.

One of the major benifits in the initiation of a process such as this is an increase in membership for the sponsoring organization and an increase in visibility for the profession. In 1982 FAPHE recorded our smallest membership since we were founded, 41 professional members and no student members. We began investigating and discussing a registration/certificatin process in 1983, since that time our membership has steadily increased. The most dramatic increase, however, is evidenced in the three year time span from the announced intent to the initiation of the gradnfathering in period. During this time membership has tripled. (See Table). With increased membership resources of the organization are also increased which means better services can be provided to members.

Professional health educators in the state of Florida sincerely believe that this process will increase the

recognition and credibility of our profession. We are well aware that our process is not perfect and we will continually refine it over the years. We are excited, however, about what is going on in Florida and nationally in our profession and believe that we have made a contribution to professional enhancement. Our process is not the answer for everyone, but we will be glad to provide any additional information upon request.

TABLE #1: FAPHE MEMBERSHIP (1981-1986)